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Shane Bernard and Julia Girouard

“Colinda”: Mysterious Origins of a Cajun Folksong

Like the Cajuns themselves, South Louisiana’s Cajun music is the synthetic product of ethnic cultural interaction.¹ Cajun musicians learned new dance rhythms and a “terraced” singing style from Native Americans. They embraced the syncopative, percussive, and improvisational styles of black Creoles and were later greatly influenced by the blues. While borrowing tunes from the Spanish and the diatonic accordion from Jewish-German immigrants, the Cajuns also composed French lyrics to Anglo-American tunes, which they reinterpreted in their own musical style. Folklorist Barry Jean Ancelet, referring to Cajun musician Dennis McGee’s “Valse du Vacher,” notes that “the singer, whose name reflects Irish roots and whose facial features reflect American Indian origins, describes the loneliness of a cowboy’s life in French to the tune of a European mazurka clearly influenced by the blues.” Many Cajun songs share a similarly diverse background, but “Colinda,” also known as “Danser Colinda” or “Allons Danser Colinda,” is perhaps most illustrative of Cajun music’s complex genealogy (Ancelet 1989:17,19).

“Colinda,” an extremely popular traditional Cajun dance song, has been recorded by numerous musicians—Cajun and otherwise—over the past half-century. The most notable renditions are Rod Bernard’s 1962 bilingual “swamp pop” version, which reinterpreted the old Cajun standard using electric instruments and a rock ‘n’ roll beat; Louisiana governor Jimmy Davis’ 1949 country version, the first to adapt English lyrics to the tune; and Leroy “Happy Fats” LeBlanc, Oran “Doc” Guidry, Sr., and the Boys’ 1946 Cajun French version, the earliest known recording of “Colinda.” Like many Cajun songs, the lyrics and tune of “Colinda” vary slightly among renditions, even among renditions by the same performers.

Although many musicians call themselves the composers of “Colinda,” the original composer or composers—as with many Cajun songs—will probably remain unknown. Enough historical evidence survives, however, to establish that “Colinda” and its sources extend much deeper into the past than post-World War II South Louisiana. It is known to have existed within the Cajun community shortly after the turn of the century, when the word *Colinda* applied to both a Cajun song and a Cajun dance. Prior to the twentieth century, however, the word referred strictly to a black Creole dance, the song’s inspiration. The lyrics “*Allons danser, Colinda*” thus originally meant “Let’s dance *the* Colinda” (a dance of African origin), not “Let’s dance, Colinda” (a girl’s name).

“Colinda” remained largely unknown outside the French-speaking communities of South Louisiana and East Texas before Rod Bernard released his swamp pop version in 1962. According to Bernard, his version, recorded in Beaumont, Texas, sold about eighty- to one hundred thousand copies, mainly along the Gulf Coast and in Canada (Broven 1983:208–209). It attracted enough attention nationally, however, to prompt an invitation from Dick Clark’s “American Bandstand,” which Bernard reluctantly turned down because of his recent induction into the military.²

Bernard’s recording owes much of its popularity to its bilingual lyrics, which caught the attention not only of French-speaking audiences in South Louisiana, East Texas, and Canada, but also of an Anglo-American audience, who found the alternating English and Cajun French lyrics too exotic to ignore. Bernard grew up at a time, however, when Cajun children were punished at school for speaking French. Although he never learned to speak the dialect, Bernard sings in French on “Colinda” and a few other swamp pop songs. The second stanza of his version reflects the period’s prevailing anti-Cajun sentiment.

Allons danser, Colinda, (2)
Pendant ta mère n'est pas là,
Pour faire fâcher les vieilles femmes.
C'est pas tout le monde à danser
Toutes les vieilles valse à deux temps.
Pendant ta mère n'est pas là,
Allons Danser, Colinda.

[trans.: Let’s dance, Colinda,
 While your mother isn’t around,
 to make the old women mad.
 Not everyone can dance
 All the old two-step waltzes.
 While your mother isn’t around,
 Let’s dance, Colinda.]

'Linda was the sweetest girl
In all the bayou land.
And all the boys who danced with her
Tried to win her hand.
Her mother always chaperoned
With 'Linda every night.
She didn't want no Cajun boys
To hold her daughter tight.³

Bernard's recording seems to have been influenced equally by Jimmy Davis' 1949 English version of "Colinda" and Happy, Doc, and the Boys' 1946 French version. Bernard undoubtedly became familiar with the latter while performing as a child on Happy and Doc's talent show, held every Saturday morning from about 1948 to 1950 at the old Rose Theater in Opelousas, Louisiana, and broadcast live on KSLO, the local radio station. Beyond this period, however, Bernard provides little information regarding the origin of "Colinda." "All I know," he says, "it's just an old song that was handed down from generation to generation. . . . Jimmie Davis sang it and Doc Guidry played fiddle and I think they put their name down as writers . . . they really didn't write it. It's an old, old, old song. They stole it first and I stole it second."⁴

As Bernard indicates, Jimmie Davis' 1949 English version of "Colinda" features Oran "Doc" Guidry, Sr., on fiddle. Guidry, co-leader of Happy, Doc, and the Boys, also appears on the 1946 Cajun French version, recorded for J. D. Miller's Fais Do Do label of Crowley, Louisiana. Miller was not involved with the production of Davis' version, but recalls: "Doc Guidry recorded that with Governor Davis and they put some English words [to it]. . . . And Governor Davis and Doc, I think, wrote the English words, I believe Doc told me, while they were flying to Nashville or wherever they recorded."⁵

Happy, Doc, and the Boys' classic 1946 version is largely instrumental. Its lyrics, however, correspond to those in the French stanza of Bernard's version.⁶ In *Yé Yaille, Chère! Traditional Cajun Dance Music*, Raymond E. François notes that "the tune is an old one, but J. D. Miller gives 'Doc' credit for the words" (1990:325). During a recent interview, however, Miller states that Fats and Guidry merely added lyrics to an existing song. Miller explains: "Let me tell you something about 'Colinda.' Doc and Fats remembered something of that old song, but didn't remember it all and actually they added words to it in New Orleans. . . . I don't know where its roots were, but just like a lot of these Cajun things, nobody knows who wrote them."⁷ But in John Broven's *South To Louisiana: The Music of the Cajun Bayous*, Fats shares with Guidry the credit for composing the entire tune and lyrics, stating:

We took the name from a song called ‘Danse Colinda,’ we got it from a book in a library at Southwestern University, Lafayette [i.e., Southwestern Louisiana Institute, now the University of Southwestern Louisiana]. Actually, it was a Haitian song, so we just took down the name, the tune is not the same, or the lyric[s]. Doc Guidry and I just sat down and we wrote a French song, a two- or three-chord song that is pretty easy to write. (1983:39)

A thorough search of the University of Southwestern Louisiana’s library holdings failed to uncover any publications corresponding to Fat’s description. In addition, the idea of traditional Cajun musicians hunting for song material in a university library seems uncharacteristic. After all, they could easily pick up new songs from other musicians on records, on the radio, or at live performances. Miller, who accompanied Happy, Doc, and the Boys to Cosimo Matassa’s studio in New Orleans to record “Colinda,” states:

I don’t know of anybody [who] went over to USL to find out about French music, being honest with you . . . that [song] was done in the same manner as the others were done. They’d come up with, ‘Look, let’s do this.’ We made up our minds the night before what we were going to record, because at that time these boys knew a bunch of Cajun songs. They [the songs] hadn’t been recorded before or they had been recorded years and years before, but in this particular instance, this was just brought up and they tried to record all the song, all the words, and they couldn’t. So they put words to [the tune], made the words up themselves.⁸

Miller again observes that Fats and Guidry wrote only a portion of the lyrics. “They didn’t know who was the original writer,” he adds, “and I doubt if anybody knows.”⁹

An interview with seventy-three-year-old Doc Guidry cleared up much confusion about the authorship of “Colinda.” When asked about the origin of the song, he initially replied: “I’m telling you, we didn’t have nothing to do about writing it—except the words.”¹⁰ Further questioning, however, helped to restore his memory and was most revealing.

Shane Bernard: You think that the song, the tune was around already?

Doc Guidry: Oh, sure.

SB: The melody already existed before you recorded it?

DG: That’s right. That’s why I said that’s our rendition of it.

SB: And what about the French lyrics?

DG: That’s the original lyrics.

SB: You didn’t write it?

DG: No.

SB: Okay—Happy Fats didn’t? So you think he [Fats] was just mistaken here [in Broven’s book] when he said that?

DG: It was a mistake when they put ‘Words and music by Happy and Doc.’¹¹

Guidry added that he and Fats didn’t locate “Colinda” in the library at Southwestern Louisiana Institute, but in a songbook belonging to Guidry’s cousin. He also noted that the songbook included both the tune and lyrics of “Colinda.”¹²

Fats and Guidry thus did not write the lyrics or tune of “Colinda,” and Guidry simply confirms what other sources already imply. For instance, Dennis McGee’s “Madame Young Donnez Moi Votre Plus Jolie Blonde,” recorded in 1929 for the Vocalion label, borrows the tune of “Colinda”¹³ (Savoy 1988:54,62–3; François 1990:209–11). Ann Allen Savoy notes in her *Cajun Music: A Reflection of a People* that “Madame Young” is: “a plea to Mrs. Ulysses Young, mother of Dennis’s first wife, Maria Young, to give him her beautiful blonde daughter. Maria’s sister, Néta Young, taught him the tune and he recorded it for her” (1988:63).

Savoy does not mention the similarity of the songs, but her account of “Madame Young’s” origin suggests that Néta Young probably taught McGee the tune of “Colinda.”¹⁴ In fact, “Colinda” is known to predate “Madame Young” by several years. In a 1962 interview by folklorist Lauren Post, pioneer Cajun accordionist Joseph Falcon states “Allons danser Colinda’—I knew that tune since I was a little boy. I played it many times. . . .” Born in 1900, Falcon thus confirms that “Colinda” existed shortly after the turn the century (Savoy 1988:96,92). Falcon also makes the only known reference to “Colinda” as both a Cajun song and a Cajun dance. “That ‘Colinda,’” he says, “that’s what the old folks call a ‘two-step waltz.’” He adds: “I had one of my musicians say that there wasn’t no such thing as that. I said, ‘Hold it brother, I’m older than you.’ He said ‘There ain’t no such thing as a two-step waltz. What number could it be?’ I said, ‘Allons danser Colinda.’ That’s a two-step waltz from the old times” (Savoy 1988:96). “Colinda’s” lyrics actually mention the “two-step waltzes” referred to by Falcon: “*C’est pas tout le monde qu’à danser / Toutes les vieilles valse à deux temps*” (“Not everyone can dance / All the old two-step waltzes”). Some versions of “Colinda,” however, delete this reference.

Falcon also agrees with Post that “Colinda” may derive from a black Creole source¹⁵ (Savoy 1988:96). Surprisingly, a 1956 field recording exists of a black Creole song called “Anons au Bal Colinda.” Although its tune clearly is related to the traditional Cajun “Colinda,” its black Creole lyrics bear no resemblance to the Cajun lyrics.

Anons au bal, Colinda. (3)
Ti vas matin dans le brouillard.
Ta robe était déchirée.

Anons au bal, Colinda. (3)
Pourquoi, ti me dis pas, Colinda,
Où t’a été hier au soir?

Anons au bal, Colinda. (3)
Alle y va matin dans le petit jour.
Sa robe était déchirée.

Let's go to the dance, Colinda.
 You go in the morning fog.
 Your dress was torn.

Let's go to the dance, Colinda.
 Why won't you tell me, Colinda,
 Where you were last night?

Let's go to the dance, Colinda.
 She left at the break of dawn.
 Her dress was torn.¹⁶

The lyrics of "Anons au Bal Colinda" closely resemble those of Cajun musician Nathan Abshire's "Pine Grove Blues," recorded for the Old Timey label in 1949, which derives from fellow Cajun musician Columbus Frugé's earlier song "Tite Negresse." Whether "Anons au Bal Colinda" or "Tite Negresse" appeared first is unknown, but the question to be asked is: could "Anons au Bal Colinda" be the melodic source for the Cajun "Colinda," or could both songs have derived from a third, much earlier song? Both the Cajun and Creole songs interpret *Colinda* as a girl's name. They also refer to dancing and exhibit an underlying sexual theme, both of which appear to be remnants of an almost forgotten source—namely, the *Calinda*, a dance of African origin, banned repeatedly by white authorities because of its lascivious nature.¹⁷

The Calinda dance survives in several Caribbean locations, including Haiti, Bequia, Carriacou, and Trinidad (Elder 1966:192). Contrary to Harold Courlander's assertion in *Negro Folk Music, U.S.A.*, the dance no longer exists in Louisiana, having disappeared, apparently, in the mid- to late-nineteenth century (1963:191). Prior to this period, however, the dance flourished in Louisiana and is mentioned in at least three Creole songs from that region, all of which include a variation of the phrase "*Danser Colinda*." Perhaps the latest example is "Michié Préval," a favorite of the slaves who gathered in New Orleans' Congo Square on Sundays to dance the Calinda. Its first verse reads:

Michié Préval li donnain grand bal,
Li fé nég' payé pou sauté in pé.
Danse Calinda, boudjoun, boudjoun!
Danse Calinda, boudjoun, boudjoun!

Monsieur Préval gave a big dânce,
He made the Negroes pay to stomp their feet.
Dance the Calinda, boudjourn, boudjourn!
Dance the Calinda, boudjourn, boudjourn!
(Monroe 1921:40–55)

Several more verses—each ending with the refrain “Dansez Calinda, boudjourn, boudjourn!”—document the riotous events of Préval’s dance, which concludes with his imprisonment by the master jailor. The slaves then rejoice that “they put him in prison / Because he gave a dance to steal our money.” Later the lyrics state that Préval was imprisoned for holding a slave dance without official permission.¹⁸

The song satirizes members of New Orleans’ upper class, its public figures in particular. Préval has been identified as a prominent New Orleans judge and a certain Michié Mazuro—who in the fourth verse is likened “in his big office” to a “bullfrog in a bucket of water”—has been identified as Attorney General Etienne Mazureau (1772–1849).¹⁹ Frequent alteration of “Michié Préval’s” title and lyrics permitted the dancers to satirize other New Orleans public figures. George Washington Cable mentions “Michié Préval” in “The Dance in Place Congo,” noting that “for generations the man of municipal politics was fortunate who escaped entirely a lampooning set to its air” and that “a page might be covered by the roll of [its] victims” (Cable 1886:527,528).

A related song, “Michié Baziro,” also mentions the Calinda. Although its tune closely resembles that of “Michié Préval,” its lyrics are largely original. Its first verse, however, mimics the fourth verse of “Michié Préval.”

*Michié Baziro don so vié biro,
Li semblé crapaud dans baille do l’eau.
Dansez Calinda, Boudoun, Boudoun.
Dansez Calinda, Boudoun, Boudoun.*

Monsieur Baziro in his old office,
Looks like a bullfrog in a bucket of water.
Dance the Colinda, Boudoun, Boudoun.
Dance the Colinda, Boudoun, Boudoun.
(Whitfield 1939:135–37)

Research fails to uncover Michié Baziro’s exact identity or occupation, but to assume that he was a public figure in New Orleans would not be absurd. *Baziro* also may be a corruption of *Mazuro*, and the song, merely one of numerous offshoots of “Michié Préval.”

The Creole song “Lizette To Quité la Plaine” also refers to the Calinda dance. First published in Louisiana in 1859, the song earlier appeared under the title “Chanson Negre,” which was published in Philadelphia in 1811. The song appeared even earlier as “Chanson Creole” in a circa 1740 treatise by Jean Jacques Rousseau concerning his invention of a new system of musical notation. The first quatrain of the third stanza mentions the dance:

*Dipo mo pèrdi Lizette,
Mo pa batte Bamboula,
Bouche a moi tourné muette,
Mo pa dansé Calinda.*

Since I lost Lizette,
I don't beat the Bamboula,
My mouth has become mute,
And I don't dance the Calinda.²⁰
(Epstein 1977:94)

Although this is the earliest known reference in song to the Calinda, many first-hand accounts of the dance itself survive. One of the latest is found in Mina Monroe's *Bayou Ballads*, first published in 1921, in which the author relates a description of the dance by “an old darkey once an expert at the Calinda.” Monroe writes:

In Louisiana, the Calinda was a war-dance in which men alone took part, stripped to the waist and brandishing sticks in a mock fight, while at the same time balancing upon their heads bottles filled with water from which one drop spilled put the participant *hors de combat*. . . . there was much sport in it at the stage of dancing with water-filled bottles, and . . . the last remaining dancer well deserved to have the water in his bottle replaced by good ‘tafia’ (whiskey) to celebrate his victory.

The main characteristic of the Calinda according to Monroe is stick-fighting, which corresponds to present-day descriptions of the dance in Trinidad. Monroe's account, however, contains the only known reference to the Calinda as a war-dance in Louisiana (Monroe 1921:vii; Elder 1966:192–203).

Another late description dates from March, 1885, when author and editor Charles Dudley Warner visited New Orleans. Entering a house near the former site of Congo Square, Warner observed “an incantation rather than a dance.” He writes:

A colored woman at the side of the altar began a chant in a low, melodious voice. It was the weird and strange ‘Danse Calinda.’ . . . The chant grew, the

single line was enunciated in stronger pulsations, and other voices joined in the wild refrain. . . . The singing became wilder and more impassioned, a strange minor strain, full of savage pathos and longing. . . . the chant had been changed for the wild *canga*, more rapid in movement than the *chanson africaine*. . . (Epstein 1977:135)

Other sources also connect the Calinda with voodoo or similar cults. Cable states in his “Creole Slave Songs” that

In Louisiana, as I have been told by that learned Creole scholar the late Alexander Dimitry, Voodoo bore as a title of greater solemnity the additional title of Maignan, and that even in the Calinda dance, which he had witnessed innumerable times, was sometimes heard, at the height of its frenzy, the invocation—

‘Aïe! Aïe!
Voodoo Magnan!’ [sic]
(Cable 1886:815–17)

In addition, Courlander claims that the Calinda survives in present-day Haiti not as a dance associated with voodooism, but with zombiism. According to the author,

There is a secret society called *Société Vinbindingue* which is dedicated to what might be called ‘zombiism.’ A person who has been ‘killed’ has been buried, and now the *zaubaups*, members of the society, are digging the body up. . . . The *zaubaups* have their own dance, the Calinda, which is in no way associated with Vodoun [Voodoo] religious practices. (Courlander 1939:71–72,88)

Moreau de Saint-Méry of Saint-Domingue (now Haiti) suggested in 1797 that the Calinda functioned as a social gathering reminiscent of a fertility ritual.

This dance has an air which is specially consecrated to it and wherein the measure is strongly marked. The proficiency in the dancer consists in the perfection with which she can move her hips and the lower part of her back while preserving the rest of her body in a kind of immobility, that even the slightest movement of the arms that balance the two ends of a handkerchief or her petticoat does not make her lose. A dancer approaches her; all of a sudden he makes a leap into the air and lands in measured time so as almost to touch her. He draws back, he jumps again, and excites her by the most seductive play. The dance becomes enlivened and soon it presents a tableau, of which the entire action, at first voluptuous, afterwards becomes lascivious. (Nettel 1946:60)

Thirty-seven years earlier English cartographer Thomas Jefferys mentions “the *Calendoe*” in a study of French colonies in the Americas. He also provides a rare reference to the geographical origin of the dance, calling it “a sport brought from the coast of Guinea, and attended with gestures which are not entirely consistent with modesty, whence it is forbidden by the public laws of the islands.” In 1758 historian and Louisiana planter (Antoine-Simon?) Le Page du Pratz observed that “Nothing is more to be dreaded than to see the Negroes assemble together on Sundays, since, under the pretense of Calinda, or the dance, they sometimes get together to the number of three or four hundred, and make it a kind of Sabbath, which it is always prudent to avoid; for it is in those tumultuous meetings that they . . . plot their rebellions” (Epstein 1977:31–32).

From Martinique in 1698 Père Jean Baptiste Labat wrote a description of the dance, giving the earliest known reference to its place of origin.

The one [dance] in which they take the greatest pleasure, which is the usual one, is the Calenda. It came from the Guinea Coast and to all appearances from Ardra. The Spaniards have learned it from the Negroes and throughout America dance it in the same way as do the Negroes. (Nettel 1946:60; see also Epstein 1977:30,32)

Labat regarded all the African dances as “*deshonnêtes*,” “*indécentes*,” “*lascives*,” and “*infame*,” but took more interest in the Calinda than other observers. Indeed, his account provides greater detail than Moreau de Saint-Méry’s. Labat writes:

The dancers are drawn up in two lines, one before the other, the men on one side and the women on the other. Those who are waiting their turns, and the spectators, make a circle round the dancers and the drums. The more adept chants a song which he composes on the spur of the moment, on some subject which he deems appropriate, the refrain of which, chanted by all spectators, is accompanied by a great clapping of hands. As regards the dancers, they hold their arms a little after the manner of those who dance while playing the castanets. They skip, make a turn right and left, approach within two or three feet of each other, draw back in cadence until the sound of the drum directs them to draw together again, striking the thighs one against the other, that is to say, the man against the woman. To all appearance it seems that the stomachs are hitting, while as a matter of fact it is the thighs that carry the blows. They retire at once in a pirouette, to begin again the same movement with altogether lascivious gestures, as often as the drum gives them the signal, as it often does several times in succession. From time to time they interlock arms and make two or three turns, always striking the thighs and kissing. One easily sees from this abbreviated description how the dance is opposed to decency.

He adds that “As the postures and movements of the dance are most indecent, the masters who live in an ordinary way forbid it to their own people, and take care that they do not dance it . . . ”(Nettel 1946:60). Not only masters but also civil authorities often prohibited the Calinda. For instance, the colonial government of Martinique outlawed the dance on May 23, 1772, reinforcing an earlier ban enacted on August 5, 1758. These prohibitions, however, merely strengthened a 1678 prohibition of the “Kalinda” by the Conseil Souverain de Martinique. This initial ban resulted from the indictment of a planter named Greny, who had permitted a day-long Calinda to be performed at a slave wedding. (Note a resemblance to the theme of “Michié Préal.”) According to civil records, a soldier sent to disperse the slaves on Greny’s plantation was forced by the dancers to flee on horseback. Needless to say, Labat’s own plan to replace the Calinda with the more civilized minuet and courante failed completely²¹ (Epstein 1977:27–28).

The precise time of the Calinda’s arrival in the New World is unknown, but Labat’s description—the earliest known reference to the dance—proves that it was already established in the Caribbean before the close of the seventeenth century. Labat and Thomas Jefferys, however, both cite Guinea, which began to supply slaves to the New World in 1562, as the Calinda’s place of origin (Grun and Stein 1991:249). Labat even pinpoints Ardra, a region near the mouth of the Volta River on the Gold and Slave Coast of Guinea (Akinjogbin 1967:214). Lee Warren, in *The Dance of Africa: An Introduction*, also traces the dance from Guinea to the New World, claiming that it similarly made its way into the African interior, where, in the vicinity of present-day Chad, it became the *Yuka* dance. Warren states that the *Yuka* later appeared in Cuba and eventually became the American Rumba, first popularized at the 1932 World’s Fair in Chicago. In addition, he suggests that other American dances—like the Shimmy, the Black Bottom, the Charleston, and the Foxtrot—descend from the Calinda. Warren also argues that several older popular dances evolved from the Calinda. For instance, Arab invaders carried it to medieval Spain as the *Zarabanda*; it later became the ever-popular *Fandango*, which in Haiti was later transformed into a religious dance called the *Loaloachi*. The *Zarabanda* also crossed the Pyrennes, becoming the popular *Sarabande* of the French nobility. All these dances, insists Warren, derive from the Calinda (1972:45–46).

Warren’s research confirms the Calinda’s existence between 711 and 1236 A.D., the period of the Arab occupation of Spain (Grun and Stein 1991:70,171). Oddly, the Provençal troubadour Raimbault de Vaqueiras composed a mildly erotic medieval dance song entitled “Calenda Maya” about 1200 A.D.²² This title translates as “The First of May,” because in this

instance *calenda* derives from the Latin *calendae*, meaning “the first of the month.” (Hence the English *calendar* and *calends*.²³) The Romanian *Colindă* (or *colinde*) also derives from this source. These are traditional rustic Christmas carols, many of which, however, are secular in nature and borrow frequently from pagan mythology²⁴ (Courlander 1963:191). The *colindă* descended from the ancient Roman New Year festival called the *Calendae*, which persisted in Eastern Europe several centuries after the downfall of Rome. In the fourth century A.D. St. John Chrysostom wrote an entire sermon on the evils of the *Calendae*. The Byzantine church repeatedly denounced the *Calendae* because of its pagan origin and in 692 A.D. the Council in *Trullo*, an ecclesiastical assembly, banned the celebration “once and for all . . . from the association of the faithful” (Wellesz 1949:68,74,79–80).

Whether or not “Calenda Maya,” the *Colindă* of Romania, and the *Calendae* of ancient Rome actually are linked to the *Calinda* dance, and therefore to the Cajun song “*Colinda*,” is presently unclear. Four of these folk traditions—the *Calinda* dance, Vaqueiras’ “*Calinda Maya*,” the *Colindă* of Romania, and the *Calendae* of ancient Rome—are associated with themes of fertility and regeneration. Although the Cajun “*Colinda*” does not possess this trait, it exhibits a sexual theme, which suggests a link to the older traditions. An etymological link may also exist between *Colinda*/*Calinda* and the other Old World traditions. W. W. Newell first suggested a link between *Calinda* and the Latin *Calendae* in 1891. William A. Read, who suggests a Congo source in his *Louisiana-French*, regards Newell’s idea as “even more preposterous” than Lafcadio Hearn’s statement that it derives from the Spanish *que linda*, meaning “how beautiful.” Courlander, however, suggests that the *Calinda* could be “an African dance with an African name, or a European dance taken over in part and adapted by the slaves, or a European name attached to a number of dances traditional among slaves.” The above evidence indicates the latter theory; namely, *Calinda* is a term of Latin origin applied to an African dance or dances (Newell 1891:70; Hearn 1885:32; Read 1939:121; Courlander 1963:191).

Speculation aside, the *Calinda* originated in Guinea prior to the late-seventeenth century. It traveled to the New World on slave ships and arrived as several dances or as a single dance that evolved into many related dances in the Caribbean and Louisiana. For example, it became an occult dance associated with Voodooism in New Orleans and Zombism in Haiti; a stick dance associated with warfare in Trinidad and also in New Orleans; and a purely social-oriented dance in many locations, with overtones of a fertility ritual. The dance survives to the present in scattered areas of the Caribbean, but in Louisiana it disappeared in the nineteenth century. Its name persisted, however, in songs like “*Michié Préval*” and “*Michié Baziro*.” Here further speculation is required: Cajuns

and black Creoles in the late-nineteenth century forgot or never experienced the Calinda. They thus mistook the phrase "*Dansez Calinda*" (a dance) for "*Danser Colinda*" (a girl's name). Cajuns or black Creoles then composed a new song around this refrain or merely adapted an older song to new meaning. While "Anons au Bal Colinda" is a candidate, "Michié Préval" and "Michié Baziro" also present themselves as possible sources for "Colinda." Indeed, the traditional Cajun "Colinda" exhibits two characteristics suggesting a link to "Michié Préval" and "Michié Baziro." First, the lyrics of all three songs express disregard for authority figures. "Michié Préval" and "Michié Baziro" satirize upper-class and even well-known citizens of New Orleans; and the voice of "Colinda" wants to dance "to make the old ladies mad." Second, a "forbidden dance" theme is prominent in both "Colinda" and "Michié Préval." The police break up Préval's dance and Préval is thrown in jail for sponsoring the event "*sans permis*"; and the voice of "Colinda" urges his partner to "dance all the old two-step waltzes . . . While your mother isn't around," apparently because the dances are considered indecent.

All three songs thus appear to have been influenced by the irreverent and lascivious nature of the Calinda dance and its frequent prohibition by authority figures. The result of this ethnic cultural interaction, "Colinda," became a traditional Cajun standard, recorded in French by Happy, Doc, and the Boys in 1946, in English by Jimmy Davis in 1949, and in French and English by Rod Bernard in 1962. Other artists also recorded versions of "Colinda" over the past half-century. "Colinda" thus possesses an extremely complex genealogy, a trait shared by numerous Cajun songs. Although "Colinda" stands apart because of its African influence and extensive evolution, it also serves as an additional example of the numerous influences on Cajun music.

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NOTES

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1. In this paper Cajun music refers to the folk music of Southwest Louisiana's white francophones; black Creole music, to the folk music of that region's black francophones, which has become present-day zydeco music; and "swamp pop," to the rhythm and blues/rock'n'roll music of mostly young Cajuns and a few black Creoles in the late 1950s and early 1960s, which was heavily influenced by traditional Cajun and Creole music and by the New Orleans Fats Domino sound.

2. Rod Bernard, interview by Shane Bernard, 19 October 1991, Lafayette, Louisiana, tape recording, Acadian and Creole Folklore and Folklife Collection, University of Southwestern Louisiana, Lafayette.

3. Transcribed and translated by Carl Brasseaux. Rod Bernard's version of "Colinda" can be heard on *Swamp Gold—Volume Two*, Jin CD-107, 1991.

4. Rod Bernard, interview.

5. J. D. "Jay" Miller, interview by Shane Bernard, 21 February 1991, Crowley, Louisiana, tape recording, Acadian and Creole Folklore and Folklife Collection, University of Southwestern Louisiana, Lafayette. Governor Jimmie Davis confirms Miller's account. Telephone interview by Ms. Lou Gabus, 15 January 1992, Lafayette to Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

6. Happy, Doc, and the Boys' version of "Colinda" appears on *Fais Do Do Breakdown, Volume One, The Late 1940s*, Flyright FLY609, 1986. A 1962 recording of "Colinda" by Doc Guidry can be heard on *The Best of La Louisianne Records*, La Louisianne LLC-1001, 1990.

7. Miller, interview.

8. Ibid.

9. Ibid.

10. Oran "Doc" Guidry, Sr., interview by Shane Bernard, 2 November 1991, Lafayette, tape recording, Acadian and Creole Folklore and Folklife Collection, University of Southwestern Louisiana, Lafayette.

11. Ibid.

12. Oran "Doc" Guidry, Sr., interview, 2 November 1991; Oran "Doc" Guidry, Sr., interview by Shane Bernard, 26 December 1991, Lafayette.

13. McGee's recording of "Madame Young" can be heard on *Louisiana Cajun Music, Volume Five, the Early Years, 1928–1938*, Old Timey Records 114, 1973.

14. The modern Cajun group Beausoleil has recorded a medley entitled "Kolinda," which combines the lyrics of "Colinda" and "Madame Young." See Beausoleil, "Kolinda," *Bayou Boogie*, Rounder C-6015, 1986.

15. A live version of "Colinda" by Joseph Falcon appears on *Joseph Falcon: Louisiana Cajun Music*, Arhoolie F 5005, 1968.

16. Performed by Godar Chalvin, 1956, Abbeville, Louisiana, field recording in the possession of Michael Doucet, Lafayette. This translation is closely based on Doucet's.

17. See François (1990:443–45) and Broven (1983:33). *Calinda* possesses a variable orthography. Other spellings are "Kalinda," "Calenda," "Kalenda," "Calendoe," "Calienda," "Caleinda," and even the familiar "Colinda." See Courlander (1963:165–67), Elder (1966:192) Epstein (1977:24, 28, 30, 31–32) and Krehbiel (1914:66, 116).

18. "Yé metté li prison/Pasqué li donnain bal pou volé nous l'arzent." Monroe (1921:49). "Michié Préval" appears under the title "Dansé Calinda" on the De Paur Chorus, *Dansé, Calinda! Creole Songs, Work Songs, Spirituals* (n.d.).

19. He resembles "dans so gros biro . . . crapaud dans in baille d'ollo" Whitfield (1939:136); Cable (1886:528); Conrad (1988).

20. Translated by Richard Guidry. The bamboula was a drum of African origin. See Epstein (1977:94).

21. See Adrien Dessales, *Histoire générale des antilles* (1847–48) in Epstein (1977:28). Three descriptions of the Calinda in Diderot's *Encyclopédie* are based on Labat's report. See *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers* (1777: s.v. "Calinda," "Negres," and "tamboula").

22. "Calenda Maya" (also spelled "Kalenda Maya") appears in numerous sources on medieval music. Excellent translations, however, are provided in Burgwinkle (1990:286–91) and Davison and Apel (1950:6, 241). A recording of "Calenda Maya" appears on The Boston Camerata, *New Britain: The Roots of American Folksong (Les racines du folksong Américain)* (1990). (The compilers of this compact disk do not associate "Calenda Maya" with "Allons Danser Colinda" but with "Cuando Por el Oriente," a Christmas processional heard among the Spanish inhabitants of New Mexico.)

23. *Oxford English Dictionary* (2nd ed., s.v. "calendar," "calends").

24. See also Dyer (1933:n.p.) and Bartók [1931; 1933] in Suchoff (1976:115, 118, 120, 121, 126).

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